

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 IO-13 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07

L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

DHA-02 OMB-01 MCT-01 /073 W
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R 010940Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6094

INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

AMEMBASSY JAKARTA

AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR

AMEMBASSY MANILA

AMEMBASSY SEOUL

AMEMBASSY TOKYO

USMISSION USUN NEW YORK

CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 4121

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SN, KS, KN, US

SUBJECT: SINGAPORE REACTION TO AUGUST 18 PANMONJUN INCIDENT

REF: (A) STATE 211862, (B) SINGAPORE 3989

CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

1. SUMMARY. GOS HAS NOT REACTED PUBLICLY OR PRIVATELY TO PANMONJUN INCIDENT. HOWEVER, LOCAL PRESS, WHICH IS GOVERNMENT INFLUENCED, HAS GIVEN AFFAIR RELATIVELY PROMINENT AND EXTENSIVE COVERAGE. COMMENTARIES CHIDE RATHER THAN CONDEMN PYONYANG'S ACTIONS, AND WHILE TONE IS BALANCED AND UNEMOTIONAL, GENERAL THRUST IS CLEARLY PRO-U.S. HOWEVER, TRAGIC INCIDENT IS LIKELY TO HAVE NO MORE THAN MARGINAL IMPACT ON GOS ATTITUDE TOWARD KOREAN ISSUE AT UNGA. END SUMMARY.

2. NOT SURPRISINGLY, GOS HAS OFFERED NO PUBLIC
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REACTION TO INCIDENT. LESS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT ALSO

NOT PARTICULARLY SURPRISING, IS ABSENCE OF ANY PRIVATE EXPRESSION OF SYMPATHY OR SUPPORT. EMBASSY PROVIDED DETAILED INFORMATION REGARDING INCIDENT TO MFA BY NOTE. EVEN DURING DISCUSSION WITH MFA OFFICER OF NAC SUMMIT, PARTICULARLY LANGUAGE ON KOREA (SEPTTEL), NO VIEWS ON PANMONJUN INCIDENT WERE EXPRESSED.

3. SINGAPORE'S ENGLISH, CHINESE AND MALAY PRESS GAVE THE PANMONJUN INCIDENT AND ITS AFTERMATH RATHER EXTENSIVE COVERAGE OVER A TWO WEEK PERIOD. REPORTS BASED ON WIRE SERVICE COVERAGE PROVIDED DETAIL ON INCIDENT, U.S. REACTION, NORTH KOREAN RESPONSE, AND WERE AUGMENTED WITH SEVERAL PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDING SEQUENTIAL SHOTS TAKEN AT DMZ AND ONE OF MIDWAY IN KOREAN WATERS. WHILE PROMINENCE GIVEN COVERAGE OF EVENT DIMINISHED WITH TIME, ARTICLES ON PANMONJUN SITUATION AND ITS AFTERMATH STILL APPEAR FROM TIME TO TIME.

4. STRAITS TIMES (ST) ON AUGUST 20 EDITORIALIZED THAT INCIDENT WAS NOT "AN ISOLATED EVENT" BUT RATHER WAS ONE OF "SPORADIC OUTBREAKS" WHICH OCCURRED IN A DMZ WHICH IS "ANYTHING BUT DEMILITARIZED". ST RECOMMENDED A "TOUGH RESPONSE" BACKED UP BY "CREDIBLE ACTION TO THIS UNWARRANTED PROVOCATION" BUT WARNED AGAINST THE INITIATION OF "ANY RASH COUNTER-MEASURE". ON AUGUST 24 ST REFERRED TO KIM IL-SUNGS'S "BELATED APOLOGY OF SORTS". ST ASSERTED, HOWEVER, THAT "APOLOGY DID NOT GO FAR ENOUGH, BOTH BECAUSE THERE WAS IN IT "NO HINT OF REMORSE" BUT ALSO BECAUSE IT DID NOT "ACKNOWLEDGE NORTH KOREAN RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE INCIDENT". ST ALSO TERMED U.S. REACTION "MEASURED AND CONTROLLED" AND CONCLUDED THAT THE DMZ ASSAULT DEMONSTRATED "THE CONTINUING NEED FOR AN AMERICAN DETERENT PRESENCE". AUGUST 24 NEW NATION EDITORIAL (REFTEL B) WAS ALONG THE SAME LINES AS COMMENTARIES IN ST, ENDING WITH ASSESSMENT THAT STEADFASTNESS OF U.S. MAY HAVE GLADDENED HEARTS IN PEKING, AS IT AMOUNTED TO RE-AFFIRMATION OF U.S. MILITARY COMMITMENT IN ASIA AFTER COMMUNIST VICTORY IN INDOCHINA, U.S. PULL-OUT FROM THAILAND AND FORTHCOMING FADE OUT FROM PHILIPPINES".

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5. COMMENT: WHILE TONE OF EDITORIALS WAS MEASURED, THEIR MESSAGE WAS REASONABLY CLEAR: IT WAS THE UNPREDICTABLE BEHAVIOR OF THE NORTH KOREANS AND THE BRUTALITY OF THEIR ACTS WHICH TRUST THE PRIMARY GUILT FOR THE INCIDENT ON THEM. INCIDENT AND PRESSURE TACTICS OF NORTH KOREANS AT NAC SUMMIT (SEPTTEL) COULD, AT MARGIN, INDUCE GOS TO BE SOMEWHAT MORE FORTHCOMING ON KOREAN ISSUE WITHIN ASEAN AND UN, (SINGAPORE 4097). HOWEVER, WE DO NOT SEE GOS

GEETING OUT IN FRONT ON ISSUE.

6. AN INTERESTING RECENT DEVELOPMENT, ALTHOUGH
ITS SIGNIFICANCE IS UNCLEAR, IS THE CANCELLATION
OF SEPTEMBER 9 NORTH KOREAN NATIONAL DAY CLEBRATION.
A LOCAL PRESS REPORT, WITHOUT ATTRIBUTION, STATED
THAT THE AFFAIR HAD BEEN SCRATCHED DUE TO
DEVELOPMENTS IN KOREA. ALSO OF INTEREST, AND PERHAPS
RELATED TO THE CANCELLATION, IS THE DEPARTURE FROM
SINGAPORE OVER THE LAST TEN DAYS OR SO OF THREE OF
THE SEVEN STAFF MEMBERS OF THE NORTH KOREAN EMBASSY.
HOLDRIDGE

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